

OT Narratives, Part 2

Reading 'Between the Lines'

- We must be careful to differentiate between what is implicit in a story and what is explicit
 - Implicit: "That which is implied though not plainly expressed"
 - Explicit: "That which is plainly expressed"
- Example: Ruth
 - Not a love story
 - A story of God's 'kindness' (1:8; 2:20; 3:10)
 - Dialogue
- The narrator and his original hearers/readers share the same presuppositions
 - And thus, did not make them explicit
 - Assumes the audience will know by the way he tells the story
 - We must discover these shared assumptions
- We must be careful to read things out of the text (Exegesis)
 - Rather than reading things into the text (Isogesis)
- Implicit does NOT mean secret

Example: Implicitness in Ruth

1. Ruth converts to faith in the Lord
 - Not explicit
 - Implied through dialogue (1:10, 16)
 - Her conversion's genuineness is confirmed by an oath (1:17)
2. Boaz was a righteous Israelite who kept the Law (2:3-13, 22; 3:10-12; 4:9-10)
 - Gleaning Laws (Lev. 19:9-10)
 - Ruth is poor, a foreigner, and a widow
 - Redemption Laws (Lev. 25:23-24)
 - Also implied that not all Israel was obedient to the Law (2:22)
3. A foreign woman belongs to the ancestry of King David (4:17-21)
 - And by extension, Jesus
4. Bethlehem was an exceptional town b/c of the faithfulness of its citizenry
 - Subtle throughout the whole narrative
 - Knowledge of what things were like in other parts of Israel is required (Judges)
 - See 2:22 as a general feel for the day
 - Every character except Ruth & Orpah are Bethlehemites
 - Naomi (1:8-9, 20-21) (1:6; 2:9-20)
 - Boaz (2:11-12; 3:10, 13)
 - Others (2:4; 4:11-12, 14)

Why is It Hard to Read OT Narratives?

- We have a tendency to ‘flatten’ the text
 - Assuming that everything written in the Bible is written directly to us
 - Thus expecting everything in the Bible to apply directly to us
- All of the Bible *is* a resource to us
 - Containing all that a believer needs for godly living
 - But this does NOT mean that each individual story is:
 - A direct word from God to us
 - Teaching us moral lessons by example

Common Errors

- Allegorizing: Looking beyond the clear meaning of the text to find a hidden meaning
 - There are a few sections of Scripture that contain allegory
 - Ez. 23 & parts of Revelation
 - But no historical narrative is intended to be allegorical
- Decontextualizing: “Ignoring the full historical and literary contexts, which give interpretational clues”
 - Leads to making the Bible say what we want it to (Isogesis)
- Selectivity: “Picking and choosing specific words and phrases to concentrate on while ignoring the others, and ignoring the overall sweep of the narrative”
- Moralizing: “The assumption that principles for living can be derived from all passages”
 - Asks, “What is the moral of this story?” at the end of each narrative
 - Fails to see the narratives as real history
- Personalizing: “Supposing that any or all parts of Scripture apply to you or your group in a way that they do not apply to everyone else.”
 - Based is self-centeredness
 - *Balaam’s donkey*: “Reminds me that I talk too much”
 - *The building of the Temple*: “God wants us to build a new church building”
- Misappropriation: “To use a text in a way that is foreign to its original use”
 - “*Laying out a fleece*” (Jdg. 6:36-40)
 - Not about discerning God’s will
 - Showing Gideon’s lack of trust
- False Appropriation: “Reading into a text suggestions or ideas that come from contemporary culture that are both foreign to the narrator’s purpose and contradictory to his point of view.”
 - *A homosexual relationship between David & Jonathan* (1 Sam. 20:17, 41)
 - Misrepresents cultural norms and the narrator’s point of view that their love was covenantal and likened to God’s love (v. 14, 42)

- False Combinations: “Combining elements from various parts of a passage and making a point from their combination, even though the elements themselves are not directly connected in the passage.”
 - *The Capture of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6-7) as recapturing (cf. Jdg. 1:8)*
 - There were 2 cities of Jerusalem: the outer city (conquered by the Judahites), and the walled city (which David conquered)
- Redefinition: “When someone is dissatisfied with the plain meaning of a text and redefines words or phrases to give it new meaning, contrary to its original.”
 - *God’s Promise to America? (2 Chron. 7:14-15)*
 - In opposition to Heb. 11:16

10 Principles for Interpreting Narratives

1. An OT Narrative usually does not directly teach a doctrine
2. An OT Narrative usually illustrates a doctrine or doctrines taught propositionally elsewhere
3. Narratives record what happened– not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time. Therefore, not every narrative has an individual identifiable moral application
4. What people do in narratives is not a necessarily a good example for us. Frequently, it is just the opposite
5. Many (if not most) of the characters in OT Narratives are far from perfect– as are their actions as well
6. We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. We are expected to be able to judge this on the basis of what God has taught us directly and categorically elsewhere in Scripture.
7. All narratives are selective and incomplete. Not all the relevant detail are always given (cf. John 21:25). What does appear in the narrative is everything that the inspired author thought important for us to know.
8. Narratives are not written to answer all our theological questions. They have particular, specific, limited purposes and deal with certain issues, leaving others to be dealt with elsewhere in other ways.
9. Narratives may teach either explicitly (by clearly stating something) or implicitly (by clearly implying something without actually saying it).
10. In the final analysis, God is the hero of all biblical narratives.